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CELEBRATION
OF THE
NINETIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE
Pennsylvania Society
FOR
PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,
FOR THE RELIEF OF FREE NEGROES UNLAWFULLY HELD IN
BONDAGE, AND FOR IMPROVING THE CONDITION
OF THE AFRICAN RACE.

HELD AT

Concert Hall, Fourth mo. (April) 14th, 1865.

INSTITUTED 1775.
INCORPORATED 1789.

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so unto them.
for this is the law and the Prophets.—MATT. vii. 12.

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ANNIVERSARY MEETING.

The President of the Society opened the meeting with the following remarks :

We have assembled this evening to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the "Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and for the relief of free negroes unlawfully held in bondage, and for improving the condition of the African race."

On the 14th day of 4th month, 1775, just 90 years ago to-day, a few peaceable and philanthropic men met in this city to consider the great question of American slavery, and to inaugurate the Society under whose auspices we are now convened.

At that time there were 400,000 slaves in the United States. The institution soon extended itself into the Territories, and it did not require the spirit of prophecy to foresee that unless this fearful blight was arrested it would, in time, sap the foundation of free Government.

After the War of the Revolution, a new impetus was given to the Society, and there were enrolled among its members many eminent men, who felt the obligation to labor for the great principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

They endeavored earnestly to impress upon the public mind the iniquity of the system of slavery, and a sense of the danger to which the country was exposed by the institution, and, as early as 1790, the Society sent a memorial to Congress, signed by Benjamin Franklin as President, asking that body to "devise means for removing the inconsistency of slavery from the American people," and "to step to the very verge of its power for discouraging every species of traffic in the persons of our fellow men."

From that day to the present, these worthy philanthropists, and their successors, have labored faithfully in this good cause.

Notwithstanding their exertions and personal sacrifices, they saw the slave power steadily increase, till the North became complicated with it politically, socially and religiously, and the whole Government was brought under its influence. There are many around me who can recall some of the scenes in which the active members of the Society participated. When the trembling fugitive escaped from the Southern prison-house, these faithful men sheltered him. He was a stranger, they took him in ; naked, and they clothed him, and when the ruthless oppressor pursued and consigned him to prison, they ministered unto him. Undaunted by threats, and undismayed by popular violence, they stood by him before the legal tribunals in the hour of his extremity, and if they succeeded in wresting him from the grasp of the oppressor, they supplied his wants and sent him on his way rejoicing.

Most of these have gone to their reward. They did not live to see the consummation of their hopes, and the fruit of their labors. In the ordering of Divine Providence, "liberty has now been proclaimed throughout all the land, and to all the inhabitants thereof."

The time has passed when we shall be called upon to promote the abolition of slavery, or to relieve free negroes unlawfully held in bondage, but a more extended field is now opening before us for the improvement of the condition of the African race. A deep rooted prejudice, which a degrading servitude and long continued oppression has fostered, still unhappily prevails to a large extent, the effect of which is manifested in a disregard of the rights and privileges of the African race.

Now, that the great national sin is being wiped away, and American society is about to be remodelled, there is a wide field opened in this department.

If the consistent friends of liberty and equality before the law continue to labor with Christian boldness and determined zeal, we may hope the time is not far distant when the American people will practically recognize the sublime truth that "all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

H. Ryland Warriner, one of the Counsellors of the Society, being introduced, said :

Four years ago this day, the audacious hand of treason succeeded in tearing from the ramparts of Sumpter the bright emblem of American sovereignty, power and freedom, and, in bloody and boastful defiance, in trampling it with unworthy feet in the dust. *To-day* that bright and beloved flag of the free flashes forth again to the Southern sunlight and the Spring breezes, waving in triumph and in power over the scarred, and torn, and tumbling battlements, where it first felt the rude breath of insult, and went down without dishonor before the blast of perjured treason !

It would certainly be fitting and proper, fellow citizens, that we should assemble here to-night, to celebrate with speech, and song, and jubilation, this, in the annals of our race, last and noblest *restoration*. The restoration of democracy in the place of deposed despotism and heartless aristocracy, of liberty and law over hateful anarchy, of American civilization over medieval barbarism, of the school-master and the spelling book over the task-master and the whipping-post, of a free press, a free Bible and a free ballot over slave codes, branding irons, manacles and bullets ! In short, of starry heaven-blest freedom over darkling heaven-curst slavery ! Nevertheless, fitting and proper as that alone might be, it is not for such commemoration that we have assembled on this 14th day of April, 1865. Ninety years ago this day, our fathers, and the fathers of American liberty and independence, formed the nucleus and laid the first foundations of a society or organization, which has taken no insignificant part in solving the great problem of universal freedom on this continent, now apparently approaching its final consummation and fruition. That organization is known as "The Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the relief of free negroes unlawfully held in bondage, and for improving the condition of the African race." To commemorate the 90th anniversary of its existence we are now assembled, and it certainly is a circumstance that seems to us not unworthy of notice, and should seem to the conspirators darkly ominous, that the bold,

bad men, who plotted a nation's overthrow that they might destroy liberty, and deify slavery, should have hit upon this day, in the very heart of joyous Spring, to inaugurate their fratricidal war. They had forgotten that liberty and Lexington were indissolubly connected with the thought of April in the hearts of their countrymen, and that the Pennsylvania Quakers and philanthropists had chosen this very month and day for the formation of a Society, whose efficient labors, unseen and unknown perhaps by them, had already jeopardized, or rendered baseless all their bright anticipations of liberty-destroying empire, or they would not have dared to make the first throw of dice in the terrible stake they were about to play, on this day or month of the calendar.

They knew not of the prayers and tears, and self-sacrificing labors of love, that consecrated this day in the calendar, devoting it to the undying triumphs of freedom, and binding all its auspices and harbingers to the utter confusion and dismay of the wildest and wickedest machinations of slavery. And while we may well believe that the noble and true men,—the Baldwins, Davises, Harrisons, Hoods, the Browns, Zanes, Morgans and Prices,—who 90 years ago this day laid the first foundation of this Society, *builded better than they knew*, we cannot escape the conclusion that the liberticides of 1861, the Barnwells, the Rhettts, the Yanceys, the Toombses, the Iversons, the Davises, the Wigfalls and the Pryors, started upon rotterer foundations, and daubed with more untempered mortar than even we feared.

I have been requested by the acting committee of this Society to give a brief outline history of its labors and purposes. To do this properly would require a larger amount of reading and preparation than I have been able to bestow, and its execution a larger exercise of patience on your part than would be becoming in me to demand. You will not fail to notice that the existence of the Society is coeval with that of the nation. It was natural that the discussion of principles, and the agitation of the public mind which attended the early throes of that great revolution which resulted in the independence of the American States, should have given rise to the formation of just such societies as this. The men of that day accepted in good faith the principles upon which alone their own struggle for independence could be justified,

and were anxious to see extended to others all the rights they claimed for themselves. No miserable spirit of truckling subserviency to the dictation of a slaveholding oligarchy had taught them the contemptible use of the word *white*, which has since been too prevalent. When they struggled for the rights of manhood, they meant *all men*, whether the epidermis were stained with the *pigmentum nigrum*, or the *pigmentum album*. Chief Justice Taney had not yet been educated, and the Nation had no school for him.

The merest glance at the names of those belonging to this Society in 1789, when it first obtained from the Legislature of this State a chartered existence, associated, it will be remembered, for the purposes set forth in the title of this Society, is enough to refute the monstrous perversion of history included in the opinion of the Supreme Court, in the celebrated Dred Scott case, wherein it is asserted, as a matter of law, that the unfortunate African race, at the very time of which we are speaking, “*whether emancipated or not, had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and government might choose to grant them,*” and, as a matter of social and political fact, that “*they had no rights which white men were bound to respect.*”

At the very head of the list stands the venerated name of Benjamin Franklin, and out of some hundreds of names mentioned in the act of incorporation, as those constituting the Society at that time, citizens of the States of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Maryland, Rhode Island, Virginia and Massachusetts, and of the kingdoms of Great Britain and France, we find such names as the following: Dr. Benjamin Rush, Robert Morris, Isaac Parrish, Tench Coxe, William Lewis, James Pemberton, Samuel Coates, William Rawle, John Jay, Samuel Hopkins, Noah Webster, Benjamin West, Granville Sharp, Dr. Richard Price, Dr. Thomas Clarkson, Right Hon. William Pitt, the Abbe Raynal and the Marquis de Lafayette, besides many others scarcely less brilliant in history.

Who can look upon this list of names and see the record which these men made for themselves on the subject of the rights of Africans by the very act of uniting in the formation of such a Society as this, and not see at once the monstrous perversion of

history, as well as of morals, crowded into the sentence, “*no rights which white men were bound to respect?*”

When this Society was formed, Pennsylvania was a slave State, or rather a slave colony, the independence of the States not yet having been seriously thought of. The first labors, therefore, of its benevolent founders were directed towards some practical scheme of emancipation. Unfortunately, owing to the disturbed condition of public affairs from 1776 till 1784, no records of the proceedings of this Society are preserved.

But we need not, therefore, infer that the Society itself was extinguished, or its beneficent labors suspended. The members of this Society, some of them at least, are known to have been the chief instigators of those measures which led to the passage of that law, of which Pennsylvania may well be proud, the Emancipation Act of 1780. For the purpose of showing how this Act was thought to affect the condition of colored persons, even by the pro-slavery party of that day,—for even in that primal golden age of American polities there was a pro-slavery party,—let me quote a few lines from the protest which the members of the Assembly, opposed to the law, chose to enter upon the minutes thereof. Hear it, you who believe in the infallibility of courts and judges, and then pass your judgment upon the historical correctness of the wonderful judicial apothegm, “*no rights which white men are bound to respect.*”

“3d. Because if the time were come* when slaves might be safely emancipated, we could not agree to their being made *free citizens* in so extensive a manner as this law proposes; we think they would have sufficiently answered their humane purposes, had these unhappy people been enabled to enjoy the fruits of their labor, and have been protected in their lives and property in the manner white persons are, *without giving them the right of voting for, and being voted into office, &c.*”

There was no party then that maintained that the right of citizenship depended on race or color. It was solely a question

* The slaveholder's time for emancipation never comes; God's time does! And when it comes, though it brings a whole nation, with bowed heads and mourning hearts, to the borders of the grave, the chains must snap, the fettered limbs go free!

of condition, *bond* or *free*. The moment the shackles, which the unjust legislation of man had imposed upon the limbs of the slave, were stricken off, that moment he arose to the full dignity of *manhood*. Assuming and receiving, at the hands of the law-makers at least, *all* the rights granted to white citizens. No guard was set at the door ways of public halls and churches, or at the entrance of public carriages and vehicles to watch lest the appearance of sable features might give offence to *aristocratic* or *autoocratic democrats*; all this is the fruit of a *meaner* age of American polities; an age, let us hope and pray, about to pass away forever. "As through the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day," so, through the shadow of the war about closing, we sweep upward to the dawn of a better age of American polities.

To show you how true are the assertions I am making, and how nearly in unison were the feelings of law-makers of that early period in our history, and the founders of this benevolent association, let me read you in connection the Preamble to the glorious Emancipation Act of the Pennsylvania Legislature of 1780, and the Preamble to the Constitution of this Society, both of which are so fraught with religious trust and fervor, as well as with a spirit of human love and charity, expansive as the universe, that the reading of them need not be apologized for on this anniversary day of our Saviour's sufferings.

First, the enactment passed March 1, 1780, by a vote of 34 to 21.

"When we contemplate our abhorrence of that condition to which the arms and tyranny of Great Britain were exerted to reduce us, when we look back upon the variety of dangers to which we have been exposed, and how miraculously our wants in many instances have been supplied and our deliverance wrought, when even hope and human fortitude have become unequal to the conflict, we are unavoidably led to a serious and grateful sense of the manifold blessings which we have undeservedly received from the hand of that Being, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh. Impressed with these ideas, we conceive that it is our duty, and we rejoice that it is in our power, to extend a portion of that freedom to others which hath been extended to us, and release from that state of thraldom, to which we ourselves were tyrannically doomed, and from which we have

now every prospect of being delivered. It is not for us to enquire why, in the creation of mankind, the inhabitants of the several parts of the earth were distinguished by a difference in feature or complexion ; it is sufficient to know that all are the work of an Almighty hand. We find in the distribution of the human species, that the most fertile, as well as the most barren, parts of the earth are inhabited by men of complexions different from ours and from each other ; from whence we may reasonably, as well as religiously infer, that He, who placed them in their various situations, hath extended equally His care and protection to all, and that it becometh not us to counteract His mercies. We esteem it a peculiar blessing granted to us, that we are enabled this day to add one more step to universal civilization, by removing as much as possible the sorrows of those who have lived in undeserved bondage, and from which, by the assumed authority of the kings of Great Britain, no effectual, legal relief could be obtained. Weaned, by a long course of experience, from those narrow prejudices and partialities we had imbibed, we find our hearts enlarged with kindness and benevolence towards men of all conditions and nations, and we conceive ourselves, at this particular period, extraordinarily called upon by the blessings which we have received, to manifest the sincerity of our profession, and to give a substantial proof of our gratitude."

Now hear the Preamble of the Constitution of our Society, and mark the parallel :

" It having pleased the Creator of the world to make of one flesh all the children of men, it becomes them to consult and promote each others happiness, as members of the same family, however diversified they may be, by color, situation, religion, or different states of society. It is more especially the duty of those persons, who profess to maintain for themselves the rights of human nature, and who acknowledge the obligations of Christianity, to use such means as are in their power to extend the blessings of freedom to every part of the human race ; and in a more particular manner, to such of their fellow creatures as are entitled to freedom by the laws and constitutions of any of the United States, and who, notwithstanding, are detained in bondage by fraud or violence.

From a full conviction of the truth and obligation of these principles,—from a desire to diffuse them, wherever the miseries and vices of slavery exist, and in humble confidence of the favor of and support of the Father of mankind, the subscribers have associated themselves under the title of the " Pennsylvania Society for promoting," &c.

One of the first labors to which the Society addressed itself in hearty earnest, was to the abolition of the foreign slave trade, it being the almost universal opinion at that time, that its destruction would soon lead to the downfall of slavery itself. One of its first public documents was a dignified and able letter addressed to a committee for abolishing the African Slave Trade, instituted in London, in July, 1787. To show you the lofty sentiments and high aspirations of the Society at that time, I quote a few sentences from that interesting letter. "We look forward with pleasure to the time, when the records of modern times shall be examined with critical exactness to know whether the souls and bodies of men were ever the objects of commerce. Whether our laws punished the stealing of a piece of plate or a few shillings with death, and at the same time conferred upon the receiver of stolen slaves, the honors of a nation. And whether it was possible for men to acknowledge the principles of human nature and the obligations of Christianity, and yet inflict upon their fellow creatures the oppressions and punishments which are connected with negro slavery in the West Indies and the Southern States."

The labors of this Society for the extinction of the detestable traffic in human beings were immense, extending, as its records fully show, not only over nearly if not quite all the States included in this Union, but stretching even to the shores of Europe and Africa itself.

In this connection it was that the Society framed that memorial to Congress, on the subject of the condition of African Slaves in this country, which met the approval and received the signature of the venerable Franklin, the last public act of importance of that great patriot and philosopher, one surely that he may well be proud of, as crowning a long and useful life. I think I may be pardoned, since Congress can no longer be frightened by the bugbear of such petitions, for quoting a paragraph from this memorial.

"From a persuasion that equal liberty was originally the portion and is still the birth-right of all men, and influenced by the strongest ties of humanity, and the principles of their institution, your memorialists conceive themselves bound to use all justifiable

endeavors to loosen the bands of slavery, and to promote a general enjoyment of the blessings of freedom. Under these impressions they earnestly entreat your serious attention to the subject of slavery, that you would be pleased to countenance the restoration of liberty to those unhappy men, who alone in this land of freedom are degraded into perpetual bondage, and who amidst the general joy of surrounding freemen, are groaning in servile subjection ; that you will devise means for removing this inconsistency from the character of the American people ; that you will promote mercy and justice towards this distressed race, *and that you will step to the very verge of the powers vested in you, for discouraging every species of traffic in the persons of our fellow men.*"

If Congress had given such serious attention to the subject matter of this memorial as was thus earnestly entreated, possibly our young nation would have been saved the bitter agonies of the last four years. But Congress was not indifferent to the memorial, as its journals show.

In March, 1790, two resolutions were passed by Congress and entered upon its journals, which set forth the views then entertained of its power to control the African Slave Trade, even in the ports of those States that admitted the importations of slaves by their own citizens. The general idea was that Congress had the power to prohibit the prosecution of the trade by foreign citizens in any of our ports, as well as to provide proper regulations for the humane treatment during their passage of such slaves as should be imported by the citizens of any State permitting this to be done. Who shall say what illiads of woe might have been spared not only to that unhappy race, but to a proud nation of freemen, if Congress had seen fit vigorously to exercise such limited powers as they conceived themselves to possess ? But it was not to be ; Providence in its inscrutable decrees has again led an oppressed people Canaan-ward through a *Red Sea !* the foam and spray whereof have verily covered the nation of oppressors !

Under the auspices of this Society a convention was held in this city in January, 1794, for promoting the abolition of slavery. This was called an American Convention, being an assembly of delegates from nearly every part of the country. This Society was represented in the Convention by the distinguished Dr.

Benjamin Rush. He was chairman of the committee appointed by this convention to draft an address which was issued by them to the people of the United States. This was a document of such simplicity, perspicuity and vigor, that I cannot forbear reading from it.

"Many reasons concur in persuading us to abolish domestic slavery in our country. It is inconsistent with the safety of the liberties of the United States. Freedom and slavery cannot long exist together. An unlimited power over the time, labor and posterity of our fellow creatures, necessarily unfit men for discharging the public and private duties of citizens of a republic.

It is inconsistent with sound policy, in exposing the States which permit it to all those evils which insurrections and the most resentful war has introduced into one of the richest islands in the West Indies.

It is unfriendly to the present exertions of the inhabitants of Europe in favor of liberty. What people will advocate freedom with a zeal proportioned to its blessings, while they view the purest-republic in the world tolerating in its bosom a body of slaves?

In vain has the tyranny of kings been rejected, while we permit in our country a domestic despotism, which involves in its nature most of the vices and miseries that we have endeavored to avoid.

It is degrading to our rank as men in the scale of being. Let us use our reason and social affections for the purposes for which they were given, or cease to boast a pre-eminence over animals that are unpolluted with our crimes.

But higher motives to justice and humanity towards our fellow creatures remain yet to be mentioned.

Domestic slavery is repugnant to the principles of Christianity. It prostrates every benevolent and just principle of action in the human heart. It is rebellion against the authority of a common *Father*. It is a practical denial of the extent and efficacy of the death of a common *Saviour*. It is an usurpation of the prerogative of the *Great Sovereign* of the Universe, who has solemnly claimed an exclusive property in the souls of men.

But if this view of the enormity of the evil of domestic slavery should not affect us, there is one consideration more which ought to alarm and impress us, especially at the present juncture. It is a violation of a divine precept of universal justice, which has in no instance escaped with impunity.

The crimes of nations as well as of individuals are often designated in their punishments; and we conceive it to be no forced

construction of some of the calamities which now distress or impend over our country, to believe that they are in the measure evils which we have meted to others."

All three of the objects of this Society, as set forth in its title, seem to have engaged its attention and exertion from the outset. But in 1805, twenty five years after the passage of the gradual Emancipation Act of our Legislature, the Society itself uses this language: "much of the exertions of our Society, will, in consequence of the rapid decline of slavery *amongst us*, be employed in future, less in obtaining the liberation of the blacks, than in the improvement of their morals, and the promotion of the education of their offspring."

But time would fail me, should I undertake even to go over the heads of the important measures adopted by this Society, and the vigorous action taken by it in every important juncture affecting the rights of manhood, or the interests of the African race, during the long and trying years of its labors. In 1820, when the slave power won its first great triumph, after the adoption of the Constitution, over the enlightened moral sense of the nation, by the admission to the Union of Missouri as a Slave State, this Society was thoroughly aroused and did what it could to deepen and extend the sentiment of hostility to slavery.

It is at a public meeting held in December of this year that the records of this Society first make honorable mention of the name of our distinguished fellow-citizen, David Paul Brown, who afterwards, for thirty years and more, as counsellor of the Society, devoted his legal abilities and forensic powers to the aid of this Society, and of the hated, oppressed, but struggling cause of human freedom. Honor to whom honor is due! Pardon me, if, in this connection, I illustrate the tiresome and self-sacrificing manner in which these labors had sometimes to be bestowed, by an anecdote as it has been told to me. In December, 1830, or thereabout, he was called upon by the venerable Thomas Shipley—for a brief period President of the Society, and whose labors of love for the black man, almost incredible in amount, persistence and devotion, are worthy of the whitest marble—to go to Trenton to defend the claim to

freedom of an alleged fugitive slave. Upon their arrival, it was found necessary to despatch a messenger in great haste to Newark. This was before the day of railroads, anterior even to the existence of the ubiquitous *Camden and Amboy*. Thomas Shipley, whose zeal would not permit him to rest night or day, while the liberty of a human being was at stake, was that messenger, and he travelled night and day, at this inclement season, to accomplish that journey. Upon his return, the exigencies of the case required the authentication of certain documents which could be made only by sending a messenger to Delaware or Maryland. This young counsellor despatched the gray-headed but devoted messenger on the long journey, whilst he undertook, with those bellows which nature provided him for lungs, and that tough persistency of brain which characterizes the hero, to hold the court and the cause subservient to a lawyer's tongue, till he should return! and he succeeded. The trial occupied *eighteen days*, but the return of these documents clinched the cause in favor of freedom; which not only sustained a worthy and reputable man in his claim to liberty, but had the effect of arousing public indignation against a system of kidnapping to which the free blacks of that State and of this were at that time, and for years afterwards more or less exposed, and led to the passage of a law in that State, soon after, giving a trial by jury to all persons claimed as slaves.

The special object of the meeting of 1820 was to arouse public attention to the aggressions of the slave power; and, as a means to that end, to memorialize the Legislature. The memorial that was then prepared uses the following language:—

“On the general subject of slavery, it is needless to enlarge. We will remind your honorable body that slavery, in any and every form, is inconsistent with the principles of our free and excellent Constitution. The Act of 1780 probably was carried as far as the danger of the country at the time would admit. If, however, a sense of danger then restrained the States from going further, a sense of danger, which, though different in form, is not less serious in aspect, should now impel it to proceed to the full length of the sound and noble doctrine laid down in the preamble to that law.

“The present juncture presents an alarming avowal of principles vitally affecting the nature of our republican Government.

Slavery is not merely tolerated, but stamped and impressed on the body of the Constitution of a new State, accompanied by an oppressive, wanton and unnecessary discrimination of the rights of citizens, depending merely on the color of their persons. Against an *innovation* so alarming, and a precedent so dangerous and injurious, we seemed called upon to raise our voice and to regulate our conduct. The admission of Missouri with such a constitution, no State can singly prevent; but every State that abhors principles so obnoxious seems bound to remove whatever may be quoted as an example in favor of them, furnished by itself. Thus, the immediate and total abolition of slavery within the limits of our own State becomes a reason of consistency and justice."

From this time till the commencement of the great civil war about closing, the labors of this Society in behalf of those poor unfortunate Africans who were either claimed as fugitives from labor, or made the victims of the wily and inhuman kidnapper, were constant and unremitting.

Keeping themselves and their labors always strictly within the limit of the law, they were yet able to do much to hedge with difficulties the way of the haughty men who made a hunting ground for fugitive chattels of the soil of Pennsylvania; and it seems as though every triumph which the kidnappers and slave-mongers obtained, when this Society threw itself in their way—which were not many nor great—only paved the way for a coming defeat, since it taught new duties to the Society, and gave its members new caution and wariness.

The triumph of the slave power in 1850, in the passage of the celebrated Fugitive Slave Law, and the hampered, irritating success it had in reclaiming fugitives in this State under it—which must be remembered by nearly all present—are an illustration of this. I had intended briefly to recount the incidents of some of the more interesting of these cases, but they are familiar to the most of you—more so even than to me—my services as counsellor of the Society having been enlisted too late in its history to render any assistance in a fugitive slave case, except the last—the last that has transpired in this free city, before a Philadelphia Judge or Commissioner, and, *thank God, the last that ever can!*

The monstrous attempt of the slave power to establish itself

virtually in all the States, free as well as slave, by aid of the Judiciary was resisted by this Society, with all its characteristic stubbornness and pertinacity, in the person of *Passmore Williamson*, in 1855. I shall not, for the want of time, recount the incidents of that struggle, full of meaning and instruction as they were; nor tell how, with smiling complacency, that placid member of the Acting Committee saw the closing upon himself of dungeon grates and doors and prison bars, while his beatified and compensated vision caught glimpses of the bursting of fetters, and the flinging wide open of the dungeon doors of the great prison-house of slavery!

Fellow-citizens, this Society, always active, unostentatious and beneficent in its labors, has had enrolled among its members some of the best and brightest names in history. Look at its departed Presidents—Benjamin Franklin, James Pemberton, Dr. Benjamin Rush, Dr. Caspar Wistar, Thomas Shipley, Dr. Joseph Parrish, and Edward Needles, whose names will long be remembered. Surely, from such as these, there could flow none but the most unpretending labors of beneficence. But, well or ill as it may have been, the labor of its two primal objects are nearly, if not quite, completed—the abolition of slavery, and the relief of free negroes unlawfully held in bondage. Fetters and manacles that seemed harder than adamant and heavier than mountains have melted like wax in the red blaze of war; and soon the jubilee shout of freedom will burst from shore to shore of the American continent.

There remains only the last grand object—*improving the condition of the African race*. You can see what there is yet to do for this object. In a great city like this, which takes special pride in its claims to the exercise of brotherly love, where complexion alone can exclude respectable men and women from taking seats in the public vehicles that traverse—and I had almost said monopolize—nearly all our public streets, we need to be reminded, as we are by the jubilations of this day, that now, for more than five years, on earth and in heaven, *John Brown's soul has been marching on!* Our simple duty, the duty of the American people, to-day, is to clear our minds of all prejudice, cant and aversion, and, accepting the facts of Divine Provi-

dence by which this hated and despised people have been led through a Red Sea of blood to the Canaan of freedom, extend to them, as to all men, *Justice*—in perfect sincerity and good faith, simple, pure, unalloyed *Justice*!

The principles of our National Constitution require this—the pledge of our loyal people, given in the darkest hour of the fearful struggle from which we are just emerging, demands it—and most reverently would I say it, the just God who reigns above, and who guides the destinies of nations, will be satisfied with nothing less!

As this nation, now in the hour of its great triumph and the crisis of its fate, shall deal with the heretofore broken and despised African, so shall it solve the problem of its future destinies! So shall it march on, serenely and securely, to grander heights than any nation ever yet aspired to; or, forgetting the charter of its liberties, and the sacrificial blood of its heroes and patriots, stumble blindly into darker gulfs of infamy and shame than ever yet overwhelmed a people! Heaven open all eyes to see and all *hearts* to *feel*, till, as a nation without pretence and without hypocrisy, we shall

“Be just, and fear not.”

The next speaker was the Rev. Alfred N. Gilbert, of New York, formerly of Kentucky, who spoke as follows:—

Ninety years in the life of an individual, an organization or a nation, comprehend many vicissitudes. Forms of civilization or uncivilization may develop or expire within that period. Very few societies preserve their existence so long. The very causes that made their existence necessary may vanish, and frequently do, within that length of time. It is, therefore, an occasion of no little interest that arises from the ninetieth anniversary of a society. It bespeaks attention, it indicates vitality of principle, it shows stamina and persistence in its membership, and formidable strength in its obstacles when its character is reformatory.

The anniversary in which we participate exemplifies all these points. Coeval with the nation, a little the elder of the two, this Society has had steadfastly before it one central object, an object humane and Christian. Its founders slumber in the grave, and

most of their successors of two generations have followed them to their quiet resting place : yet the Society still endures. New blood has been infused into its veins as the old has passed away, ever retaining the identity of principle and purpose until, in the eighty-ninth of independence, it celebrates the completion of the ninetieth year of its existence.

Its vicissitudes have been wonderful. Organized at a time when the sentiment of the best and strongest of the country was with it in its object ; existing for years side by side with Washington and Jefferson, and other patriots, with whom there was no question of the wrong of slavery, but only of the best mode of disposing of it, this Society lived to see the teachings of sages and patriots alike forgotten or disregarded. It lived to see the invention of the cotton-gin revolutionize the moral sense of a nation. It lived to see a free country bow in abject submission to the most remorseless tyranny that the world has ever seen : a tyranny having its origin in lust of wealth, and its increase in lust of power. It lived to see the system of slavery not only extending its territory, not only widening its influence, but at the same time growing yearly more oppressive, more wicked, more defiant of God and oblivious of Christ, till it seemed as if the nation loved it for its crimes. It lived to see the nation, the proud nation which had inscribed freedom on its banner, which had declared all men equal, stand as the last grand bulwark of slavery, and constitute itself, in 1850, into a vast body of slave-catchers.

And then began the recoil. The finger of God came out on the great wall of the future, gleaming in the flash of His fierce anger, and began to write Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin ; and the slaveocrat saw it and trembled—not with fear, but rage, and filled with the impious purpose to seize the reins from the hands of God. But the letters gleamed still.

This Society lived to see Satanic cunning and fraud culminate in the record of Buchanan's Cabinet—lived to see the Government ground in the dust at the feet of the slave fiend, and, finally, to see the weapons of fraud thrown down and those of brute force taken up, and has lived to see those weapons drop from the nerveless grasp of the slave power.

After years of weary waiting and labor and watching, under the burden of national hatred and scorn, it now sees its grand principles inscribed on the banners of the mature nation as it was written on the foundation stone of the Republic, and the motto on the dear old bell whose brazen peal told of the signing of the Declaration, practically realized throughout the land : “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof.”

Brethren, your mission is almost accomplished. The long, long weary day is almost passed away. When your centennial shall arrive, not a shackled slave will stand on the soil of the United States of America, and, if I do not much mistake, the entire civilized world will have cleansed itself of the foul blot that has stained the century, otherwise so significant of progress.

And to-night the nation rejoices with you—rejoices over that which is as significant of the future as your experience is of the past. To-day, at twelve o'clock, in the harbor of Charleston, the stately forts, the formidable earthworks, the great circles of cannons which announced to the world that the slaveholders' Rebellion was inaugurated, have pealed in a thundering burial salute over its grave. To-day, the precious symbolic flag, whose downward fluttering told of national shame and humiliation more bitter than death, winged its glittering way to the summit of a flag-staff, from which its flaunting folds proclaim that Union and Liberty are one and indivisible, now and forever. To-day, the man whom slavery hated and feared as much as any other, Henry Ward Beecher, is the chosen messenger to tell the friends of slavery, on the classic ground of its intellectual Capital, in the State of its most honorable exponent, that it is dead, *dead, dead*, for the rains of heaven to fall upon and the fowls to devour.

Four years of the commercial life of the highly successful firm of Uncle Sam, Abraham Lincoln and the loyal people of the United States have just expired ; and as they are about to change their business entirely, it is highly necessary that the books should be examined and closed, a balance sheet struck, and our stock account opened anew. And as it is usual to close the

various accounts into profit and loss, no better time than this can be selected to see where we stand, what we have gained and what lost, what we owe and what is owing to us.

The speaker then went into an examination of the losses and gains which have grown out of this terrible conflict.

We have lost slavery, he said, and there are few to weep. Some boasting, storming, cursing, chewing, spitting Legree may squeeze a tear to its memory out of the corners of his red eyes; some of those antiquated fossils who believe in conservatism, even though it be unto death, may pucker their eyebrows and sigh at the innovations and radicalisms of the age; some languid beauties, poisoned into inanity and uselessness by the blandishments of the system, may mourn for the departed Phillis or Chloe, who will not return, or insist on wages; but the good and the holy, the just and true, the brave and magnanimous, will rejoice to be chief pall-bearers at the glad funeral of our departed shadow. We have lost slavery, but such losses enrich a nation.

Among the losses he enumerated the loss of property, the destruction of cities and towns, and lastly and saddest of all, the loss of men—brave men, true men, such men as are a crown of glory to any nation to which they belong. Men from the mansions of the wealthy and the hut of the laborer; from the store, the office, the counting-room, the farm, the workshop. Men with the white frost of many winters upon their scant locks, and others with the clustering curls of scarcely developed manhood. Men among whom a distinction in color has never constituted a distinction in bravery or self-sacrifice. Amid the whirr of the bullets and the clash of arms, they have fallen in instant and glorious death; overlooked by the legions who swept onward or backward, they have dragged themselves to lonely nooks; and poured out their hearts' noble blood, or, after weeks and months of patient, weary suffering, have given up their lives for their country. They are lost to us, but not their memory or their influence. The land of the nation has been made holy by the blood of voluntary sacrifice, and assured to freedom and to God for all the years of the future. The flagstaff of the oppressor cannot and shall not be planted in the soil made crimson by their wounds, and their

memory shall be to us a mine of precious strength for the conflicts of the future.

Among the gains of the country, he enumerated the development of patriotism, resources and strength; and, growing out of these, we have gained permanent peace abroad.

The speaker next alluded to the debts of the nation. First, said he, we owe gratitude to our God. Never was nation so truly blessed. Never were His finger prints more plainly discernible in national life. With the mind of infinite wisdom, the heart of infinite love and the hand of infinite power, He has led us, under crosses and through trials, upward to an elevation, a fulness of joy, a development of life far beyond what we would or could have carved out for ourselves.

We also owe a debt to those who have perilled their lives in the cause of freedom; and, while the speaker believed that we should extend to the masses engaged in the rebellion, mercy, pity, and sympathy, he demanded not that vengeance should be meted out to the leaders, but inflexible justice, so that a premium shall not be put upon treason for all time to come.

Another debt we owe (said the speaker,)—to the colored race, the loyalists of the South. This war has been full of records of negro agency in our behalf. Negro guides have piloted our forces; negro sympathy cared for our prisoners escaping from the enemy; negro hands have made for us naval captures; negro spies brought to us most valuable information. The negroes of the South have been in sympathy with us from the beginning, and have always hailed the approach of our flag with the wildest demonstrations of joy. To abandon them now to the tender mercy of their former masters would be to overwhelm ourselves with disgrace and them with misery.

For suppose the Constitutional Amendment to have been ratified, and slavery therefore abolished, there are a thousand ways in which the freed negroes might be forced to a condition little better than slavery. The tendency of capital is, directly or indirectly, to own labor, and never were there better opportunities for the success of this tendency than will be presented in the South. All the traditions and instincts of the Southern people would conduce to this result. Nor would I trust to Northern

emigration to prevent it. In the North itself, a pride of race, an instinct of dislike or contempt for the negro is so common, that a large number of the immigrants would be predisposed to fall in with the views of the original inhabitants.

It is obligatory upon the Government to see that the negro is not placed at the mercy of his former owners. The only way in which this can be effectually provided for is to give to him the right of suffrage. With the ballot in his hands he can protect himself, and the race would hold a balance of power between any two parties that would effectually prevent any attempt to oppress them.

Some may think universal negro suffrage dangerous. Is it any more so than universal white suffrage as it now exists in the North? Would negroes more unblushingly vote for leaders or money than many whites now do? Moreover, this measure would benefit the whole Southern population. It would be an effectual guarantee to those white loyalists who might otherwise suffer.

One thing is certain. It is our duty either to secure to the negro, in fact as well as name, the freedom which we have given to him, or to place him in a position where he may secure it to himself. In no way can you more certainly excite the self-respect of the freedmen, and thus start the train of agencies that shall make them useful and desirable members of the community, than by giving them to realize their full manhood. Suffrage will at least conduce to this end. I do not wish the colored race to continue the creditors of the nation.

Another debt we owe—to England! Not war I think, however. What should we gain by going to war? There is no great principle to be established, no great concession to be obtained. It would be hardly worth while, for the sake of making England pay the few millions destroyed by her corsairs, to spend ten times as much, and cause our merchants to lose ten times as much, as they inevitably would in case of war.

I do not see how we can afford to let England pay these damages. The precedent is too precious. We should retain them as a rod to hold *in terrorem* over British heads for all times to come. Demand a settlement? Never! Compound a felony? Never! All is summed up in the monosyllable, *Wait*.

To the widows and orphans of our dead soldiers we owe protection and support.

To ourselves we owe perseverance in the right course upon which we have entered. After the Rebellion we enter upon the fourth period of our existence as a people. We have had our twilight, our starlight, our moonlight ; already we see gilding the mountain tops of promise our glorious sunlight.

Our twilight was the revolution. Great forms were seen dimly. Luminous patches revealed themselves through the haze, telling of unrevealed beauty. Soon, as battle-smoke and murky cloud-wreath rolled away, the gleaming starlight shone forth, the starlight of the Confederation.

But the yearning cry of humanity and progress was for *more light*, and the dissevered stars commingled to a single silver orb, and in the closer bond and consolidated strength of the Constitution of '87, the moonlight spread its beauteous rays. Men gazed and admired, and our country prospered ; but after all it was only moonlight,—a borrowed radiance; only liberty's glorious rays reflected from a background of bondage.

Twilight, starlight, moonlight, all are gone. Each successive emergenee of light was from a crisis of blood or gloom ; the twilight from British oppression ; starlight from the sorrows of the first war ; moonlight from the failure and threatened destruction of the Confederation ; and now, from the storm and darkness in which the moonlight has been lost, cometh forth the sunlight, never to grow dim till time shall be no more.

Shine, oh, Sun ! gleam, oh, golden-tinted mountain tops ! Reflect back the fiery rays, oh, rolling billows of humanity's great ocean ! Sing, oh mountains, and let the little hills clap their hands together for joy ! Upward it climbs, the sun of universal liberty, and the earth grows green with the spring-time of the Millenium ! It touches the bowed slave of the cotton field, and he stands erect in conscious manhood. The *fungi* that have accumulated wither beneath its burning rays, and the world is beautiful.

Henceforth, the toiling patriot, waiting and watching, shall place in his book of synonyms, Liberty, Columbia, Hope, America ; and when the fulness of time shall have come, the clarion

voice of our country shall peal through the Old World as the trumpet of the archangel, summoning the victims of tyranny from the grave of oppression, tearing from humanity the soiled work-day garments of the past, and clothing her in costly robes from the treasure-house of freedom.

Wm. S. Pierce, Esq., for many years one of the Society's counsellors, was introduced, and next reviewed some of the fugitive slave cases which he had aided in defending; but as this and the succeeding remarks were *extempore*, we are prevented from publishing them.

Rev. Henry Highland Garnett, of Washington, made a few remarks, but owing to indisposition, could not speak at much length.

Joseph R. Rhoads, Esq., then read a letter from David Paul Brown, Esq., who has, for nearly 50 years, been one of the counsellors of the Society.

Rev. John Walker Jackson, of Harrisburg, next spoke, and claimed that the first blood shed in the defence of our Government in the great war now happily drawing to a close, was that of a colored man from Pennsylvania, killed in Baltimore by the secession mob, he being with the soldiers that rushed to the defence of the Capitol.

Benj. H. Brewster, Esq., being loudly called for, came forward and addressed the meeting, and avowed himself "now, henceforward and forever, an unconditional radical abolitionist." In reply to one of the audience in regard to colored people riding in the cars, he exclaimed, "Have I not already given my opinion? But why talk of cars? That is a small local question: give the negro the ballot, and he will legislate himself not only into the cars, but gain all his rights." Subsequently he remarked, extending his hand to H. H. Garnett, who rose and clasped it, "I was reared a gentleman, I practice the profession of a gentleman, and I claim to be a gentleman, and I can take this colored man, who is black enough to be a fair representative of the negro, by the hand, and call him my brother."

At a late hour the meeting closed, but the pleasure awakened by the occasion was marred by learning next morning that, at about the same hour, our estimable President had fallen by the hands of an assassin.

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